

# ANGLO-IRISH BALLADS



A TEXT BOOK FOR  
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS



M. H. GILL AND SON, LTD.,  
43 UPPER O'CONNELL ST., DUBLIN

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truly yours  
Thomas Davis.

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## INTRODUCTION

**N**O more fitting introduction to this collection of national poetry could be found than the words of our great patriotic poet, Thomas Davis. Speaking of the "Ballad Poetry of Ireland," he says: "That a country is without national poetry proves its hopeless dulness or its utter provincialism. National poetry is the very flowering of the soul—the greatest evidence of its health, the greatest excellence of its beauty. Its melody is balsam to the senses. It is the playfellow of childhood, ripens into the companion of his manhood, consoles his age. It presents the most dramatic events, the largest characters, the most impressive scenes, and the deepest passions in the language most familiar to us. It shows us magnified, and ennobles our hearts, our intellects, our country, and our countrymen—binds us to the land by its condensed and gem-like history, to the future by examples and by aspirations. It solaces us in travel, fires us in action, prompts our invention, sheds a grace beyond the power of luxury round our homes, is the recognised envoy of our minds among all mankind and to all time."

We, in Ireland, can boast of a national poetry more alive and vehement, more passionate and

appealing than that of most countries. Our chequered history has inspired the singers of all ages; our fight for faith and fatherland echoes through our native songs, making our national poetry a heritage of which we may well be proud. The very inadequate selection which this textbook introduces to you should encourage you to study more eagerly the heroic tales of your country, and should teach you to cherish the deeds that have kept the spirit of nationality alive, through ages of desolation and depression.

\* \* \* \* \*

**METRE.**—Metre is the measure of language by accented and unaccented syllables, into which English speech is naturally divided. Accented syllables are those on which the voice dwells in order to distinguish them from the less important syllables of which the words are composed. This dwelling, or stress of the voice, is called accent, and is used to fix the hearer's attention on the more important points of the speech. It only falls on important words, and on the more important parts of the important words.

**ACCENT.**—The natural effect of this accent, or dwelling of the voice, is to lengthen, to a very tiny degree, the small fraction of time taken to pronounce a syllable. Thus, in pronouncing the word 'regular,' the first syllable, which is the

accented one, is prolonged by the voice to a very tiny, but quite perceptible, extent as compared with either of the two unaccented syllables which follow it. Accented syllables may thus be conveniently referred to as 'long syllables,' and unaccented ones as 'short syllables.' In this way syllables may be divided into 'longs' and 'shorts'; though it is well to note that the 'length' of time taken to pronounce the syllable is not the same thing as the 'accent'; it is the result of the accent.

POETRY, MUSIC AND RHYTHM.—If verse contain the expression of beautiful and elevating thoughts, it is called 'poetry.' Of course, a great deal of verse is written which is not poetry, as writers who have the skill to measure their language correctly by longs and shorts or accented and unaccented syllables, have not always beautiful and elevating thoughts at their command. All students of literature may be reasonably required to practise writing verse, but they cannot be reasonably expected to produce poetry when they do so. The production of poetry depends upon a special gift or faculty, which is so rare that it has come to be referred to as 'inspiration,' *i.e.*, something instilled into the mind by a higher power. The gift or faculty of poetry is in many respects similar to the gift or

faculty of music—an allied art. Poets and musicians, *i.e.*, composers of true music, are rare; but the taste for both poetry and music is enjoyed by large numbers who are neither poets nor musicians. Many who have a taste for poetry (regularly measured, or rhythmical, language) have no taste for music (regularly measured, or rhythmical, sound). Rhythm means the recurrence of similarly regulated motion.

**METRICAL FEET.**—For further convenience of measuring verse, syllables are grouped into ‘feet.’ A foot generally contains one accented, or ‘long,’ syllable, with which one or more short syllables are associated. The following are the principal feet used in metrical composition, with their traditional names, taken from the ancient Greek ‘prosody,’ or science of verse:

Disyllabic:

*Iambus*, ◡ — ; short and long;

But ere | the voice | was whol | ly spent |

*Trochee*, — ◡ ; long and short;

Till, where | at meat | the mon | arch sate |

Trisyllabic:

*Dactyl*, — ◡ ◡ ; long and two shorts;

Stand like | Druids of | old, with | voices | sad and pro | phetic |

*Anapæst*, ◡ ◡ — ; two shorts and a long;

Then away | to the hills | to the glens | to the rocks |

*Amphibrach*, ◡ — ◡ ; short long and short;

I galloped | Dirck galloped | we galloped | all three |

Using the above Greek names in the adjective form, we speak of iambic, trochaic, dactylic, anapæstic, and amphibrachic feet.

**RHYME AND ASSONANCE.**—Rhyme affects accented syllables only, and consists in the similarity of sound between two words, of which the accented vowel sound is the same in each, and the consonant sounds (if any) following the vowel are also identical, the consonants preceding the vowel alone differing: *e.g.*, contrive—alive; again—or men; kin—pin; make—shake; glory—story; two—rue; juice—loose; chew—glue; annoy—boy; in the end—it may mend; art—part. Rhyme is very largely employed as an ornament in English verse.

\* \* \* \* \*

**SUBJECT MATTER OF THE BALLAD.**—The ballad is a lyric poem which in its origin was intended to be accompanied not only by music, but dancing, but has long since settled down into a form of narrative poetry, dealing with a particular short story or incident. The peculiarity of the ballad is that it refers to an incident with which the audience is supposed to be acquainted, and does not give a methodical recitation of the facts, such as a newspaper report would. It picks out salient features of the story, and presents them with the author's comment, which

either directly or indirectly challenges the sympathy of the hearers with the author's own point of view. The ballad has consequently not only a subjective element, as in all lyric poetry, but also purports definitely to represent the popular sympathy and general feeling. A frequent subject with the ballad writer is the death of a popular hero or the chronicling of some martial event.

**METRICAL FORM.**—As the ballad is popular in its appeal, it follows that its metrical form must naturally be of the simplest. It is written regularly in stanzas of four verses, the first and third containing four feet, and the second and fourth three feet. A departure from this regular form is seen in Ferguson's "Burial of King Cormac," where each line contains four feet instead of the alternate arrangement of four and three feet. Examine the stanza :

∪   —   ∪   —   ∪   —   ∪   —  
 But he who made the tree to grow,  
 ∪   —   ∪   —   ∪ — ∪   —  
 And hid in earth the iron-stone,  
 ∪   —   ∪   —   ∪   —   ∪   —  
 And made the man with mind to know,  
 ∪   —   ∪' —   ∪   —   ∪   —  
 The axe's use, is God alone.

You will find in each line four feet, each foot measure consisting of an unaccented followed by an accented syllable, while alternate lines rhyme.

Sometimes, for the sake of variety, each couplet is printed as one verse of seven feet, and then the verses fall into rhyming couplets, as :

The summer sun is falling soft on Carbery's hundred Isles,  
The summer sun is gleaming still through Gabriel's rough defiles,

HISTORY OF THE BALLAD IN IRELAND.—Ballad poetry in Ireland may be divided into three distinct classes : the Gaelic ballads, written in the Irish language, many of which have been translated by Mangan, Ferguson and Callanan ; the street ballads, the traditional songs of the people, preserved by roving singers, and numbering such well-known songs as " The Wearing of the Green," " The Shan Van Vocht," " Willy Reilly " ; and lastly, the Anglo-Irish ballads, written within the last century. Poets who have contributed the best work in this class are Ferguson, Griffin, Davis and Callanan. It is with this third series of ballads that we are chiefly occupied in the text.



# ANGLO-IRISH BALLADS

## THE DEATH OF KING CONOR MAC NESSA

### I

'Twas a day full of sorrow for Ulster when Conor  
Mac Nessa went forth  
To punish the clansmen of Connaught who dared  
to take spoil from the North ;  
For his men brought him back from the battle  
scarce better than one that was dead,  
With the brain-ball of Mesgedra\* buried two-  
thirds of its depth in his head.  
His royal physician bent o'er him, great Fingen,  
who often before  
Staunched the war-battered bodies of heroes, and  
built them for battle once more,  
And he looked on the wound of the monarch, and  
heark'd to his low-breathed sighs,  
And he said, " In the day when that missile is  
loosed from his forehead, he dies.

\* The pagan Irish warriors sometimes took the brains out of champions whom they had slain in single combat, mixed them up with lime, and rolled them into balls, which hardened with time, and which they preserved as trophies. It was with one of these balls, which had been abstracted from his armoury, that Conor Mac Nessa was wounded, as described in the text.

## II

“ Yet long midst the people who love him King  
Conor Mac Nessa may reign,  
If always the high pulse of passion be kept from  
his heart and his brain ;  
And for this I lay down his restrictions :—no  
more from this day shall his place  
Be with armies, in battles, or hostings, or leading  
the van of the chase ;  
At night, when the banquet is flashing, his  
measure of wine must be small,  
And take heed that the bright eyes of woman be  
kept from his sight above all ;  
For if heart-thrilling joyance or anger awhile o’er  
his being have power,  
The ball will start forth from his forehead, and  
surely he dies in that hour.”

## III

Oh ! woe for the valiant King Conor, struck down  
from the summit of life,  
While glory unclouded shone round him, and  
regal enjoyment was rife—  
Shut out from his toils and his duties, condemned  
to ignoble repose,  
No longer to friends a true helper, no longer a  
scourge to his foes !

He, the strong-handed smiter of champions,  
the piercer of armour and shields,  
The foremost in earth-shaking onsets, the last out  
of blood-sodden fields—  
The mildest, the kindest, the gayest, when revels  
ran high in his hall—  
Oh, well might his true-hearted people feel  
gloomy and sad for his fall !

## IV

The princes, the chieftains, the nobles, who met  
to consult at his board,  
Whispered low when their talk was of combats  
and wielding the spear and the sword :  
The bards from their harps feared to waken the  
full-pealing sweetness of song,  
To give homage to valour or beauty, or praise to  
the wise and the strong ;  
The flash of no joy-giving story made cheers or  
gay laughter resound,  
Amidst silence constrained and unwonted the  
seldom-filled wine-cup went round ;  
And, sadder to all who remembered the glories  
and joys that had been,  
The heart-swaying presence of woman not once  
shed its light on the scene.

## V

He knew it, he felt it, and sorrow sunk daily more  
deep in his heart ;

He wearied of doleful inaction, from all his loved  
labours apart.

He sat at his door in the sunlight, sore grieving  
and weeping to see

The life and the motion around him, and nothing  
so stricken as he.

Above him the eagle went wheeling, before him  
the deer galloped by,

And the quick-legged rabbits went skipping from  
green glades and burrows a-nigh,

The song-birds sang out from the copses, the bees  
passed on musical wing,

And all things were happy and busy, save Conor  
Mac Nessa the king !

## VI

So years had passed over, when, sitting midst  
silence like that of the tomb,

A terror crept through him as sudden the moon-  
light was blackened with gloom.

One red flare of lightning blazed brightly,  
illuming the landscape around,

One thunder-peal roared through the mountains,  
and rumbled and crashed underground ;

He heard the rocks bursting asunder, the trees  
tearing up by the roots,  
And loud through the horrid confusion the howl-  
ing of terrified brutes.  
From the halls of his tottering palace came  
screamings of terror and pain,  
And he saw crowding thickly around him the  
ghosts of the foes he had slain !

## VII

And as soon as the sudden commotion that  
shuddered through nature had ceased,  
The king sent for Barach, his druid, and said :  
“ Tell me truly, O priest,  
What magical arts have created this scene of  
wild horror and dread !  
What has blotted the blue sky above us, and  
shaken the earth that we tread ?  
Are the gods that we worship offended ? what  
crime or what wrong has been done ?  
Has the fault been committed in Erin, and how  
may their favour be won ?  
What rites may avail to appease them ? what  
gifts on their altars should smoke ?  
Only say, and the offering demanded we lay by  
your consecrate oak.”

## VIII

“ O king,” said the white-bearded druid, “ the  
truth unto me has been shown,  
There lives but one God, the Eternal ; far up in  
high Heaven is His throne.  
He looked upon men with compassion, and sent  
from His kingdom of light  
His Son, in the shape of a mortal, to teach them  
and guide them aright.  
Near the time of your birth, O King Conor, the  
Saviour of mankind was born,  
And since then in the kingdoms far eastward He  
taught, toiled, and prayed, till this morn,  
When wicked men seized Him, fast bound Him  
with nails to a cross, lanced his side,  
And that moment of gloom and confusion was  
earth’s cry of dread when He died.

## IX

“ O king, He was gracious and gentle, His heart  
was all pity and love,  
And for men He was ever beseeching the grace of  
His Father above ;  
He helped them, He healed them, He blessed  
them, He laboured that all might attain  
To the true God’s high kingdom of glory, where  
never comes sorrow or pain ;

But they rose in their pride and their folly, their  
 hearts filled with merciless rage,  
 That only the sight of His life-blood fast poured  
 from His heart could assuage :  
 Yet while on the cross-beams uplifted, His body  
 racked, tortured, and riven,  
 He prayed—not for justice or vengeance, but  
 asked that His foes be forgiven.”

## X

With a bound from his seat rose King Conor, the  
 red flush of rage on his face.  
 Fast he ran through the hall for his weapons, and  
 snatching his sword from its place,  
 He rushed to the woods, striking wildly at boughs  
 that dropped down with each blow,  
 And he cried : “ Were I midst the vile rabble,  
 I’d cleave them to earth even so !  
 With the strokes of a high king of Erin, the  
 whirls of my keen-tempered sword,  
 I would save from their horrible fury that mild  
 and that merciful Lord.”  
 His frame shook and heaved with emotion ; the  
 brain-ball leaped forth from his head,  
 And commending his soul to that Saviour, King  
 Conor Mac Nessa fell dead.

—*T. D. Sullivan,*

## THE BURIAL OF KING CORMAC

“ Crom Cruach and his sub-gods twelve,”  
Said Cormac, “ are but carven treene,  
The axe that made them, haft or helve,  
Had worthier of our worship been.

“ But He who made the tree to grow,  
And hid in earth the iron-stone,  
And made the man with mind to know  
The axe’s use, is God alone.”

Anon to priests of Crom was brought—  
Where, girded in their service dread,  
They ministered on red Moy Slaughter—  
Word of the words King Cormac said.

They loosed their curse against the king;  
They cursed him in his flesh and bones;  
And daily in their mystic ring  
They turned the maledictive stones,

Till, where at meat the monarch sate,  
Amid the revel and the wine,  
He choked upon the food he ate,  
At Sletty, southward of the Boyne.

High vaunted then the priestly throng,  
And far and wide they noised abroad  
With trump and loud liturgic song  
The praise of their avenging god.

But ere the voice was wholly spent  
That priest and prince should still obey,  
To awed attendants o'er him bent  
Great Cormac gathered breath to say :

“ Spread not the beds of Brugh for me  
When restless death-bed's use is done :  
But bury me at Rossnaree,  
And face me to the rising sun.

“ For all the kings who lie in Brugh  
Put trust in gods of wood and stone ;  
And 'twas at Ross that first I knew  
One, Unseen, who is God alone.

“ His glory lightens from the east ;  
His message soon shall reach our shore ;  
And idol-god and cursing priest  
Shall plague us from Moy Slaughter no more.”

Dead Cormac on his bier they laid :—

“ He reigned a king for forty years,  
And shame it were,” his captains said,  
“ He lay not with his royal peers !

“ His grand-sire, Hundred-Battle, sleeps  
Serene in Brugh : and, all around,  
Dead kings in stone sepulchral keeps  
Protect the sacred burial ground.

“ What though a dying man should rave  
Of changes o’er the eastern sea?  
In Brugh of Boyne shall be his grave,  
And not in noteless Rossnaree.”

Then northward forth they bore the bier,  
And down from Sletty side they drew,  
With horseman and with charioteer,  
To cross the fords of Boyne to Brugh.

There came a breath of finer air  
That touched the Boyne with ruffling wings,  
It stirred him in his sedgy lair,  
And in his mossy moorland springs.

And as the burial train came down,  
With dirge, and savage dolorous shows,  
Across their pathway, broad and brown  
The deep full-hearted river rose ;

From bank to bank through all his fords,  
’Neath blackening squalls he swelled and  
boiled ;  
And thrice the wondering gentile lords  
Essayed to cross, and thrice recoiled.

Then forth stepped grey-haired warriors four :  
They said, " Through angrier floods than  
these,  
On link'd shields once our king we bore  
From Dread-Spear and the hosts of Deece.

" And long as loyal will holds good,  
And limbs respond with helpful thews,  
Nor flood, nor fiend within the flood,  
Shall bar him of his burial dues."

With slanted necks they stooped to lift ;  
They heaved him up to neck and chin ;  
And, pair and pair, with footsteps swift,  
Locked arm and shoulder, bore him in.

'Twas brave to see them leave the shore ;  
To mark the deep'ning surges rise,  
And fall subdued in foam before  
The tension of their striding thighs.

'Twas brave, when now a spear-cast out,  
Breast-high the battling surges ran ;  
For weight was great, and limbs were stout,  
And loyal man put trust in man.

But ere they reached the middle deep,  
Nor steadying weight of clay they bore,  
Nor strain of sinewy limbs could keep  
Their feet beneath the swerving four.

And now they slide, and now they swim,  
And now, amid the blackening squall,  
Grey locks afloat, with clutchings grim,  
They plunge around the floating pall.

While, as a youth with practised spear  
Through justing crowds bears off the ring,  
Boyne from their shoulders caught the bier,  
And proudly bore away the king.

At morning on the grassy marge  
Of Rossnaree the corpse was found,  
And shepherds at their early charge  
Entombed it in the peaceful ground.

A tranquil spot: a hopeful sound  
Comes from the ever youthful stream,  
And still on daisied mead and mound  
The dawn delays with tenderer beam.

Round Cormac Spring renews her buds;  
In march perpetual by his side  
Down come the earth-fresh April floods,  
And up the sea-fresh salmon glide.

And life and time rejoicing run  
From age to age their wonted way;  
But still he waits the risen Sun,  
For still 'tis only dawning Day.

—*Sir S. Ferguson.*

## THE PASCHAL FIRE OF PATRICK

On Tara's hill the daylight dies,  
On Tara's plain 'tis dead.  
“Till Baal's unkindled fires shall rise  
No fire must flame instead.”  
'Tis thus the king commanding speaks,  
Commands and speaks in vain;  
For lo! a fire defiant breaks  
From out the woods of Slane.

For there in prayer is Patrick bent,  
With Christ his soul is knit;  
And there before his simple tent  
The Paschal fire is lit.  
“What means this flame that through the night  
Illumines all the vale?  
What rebel hand a fire dare light  
Before the fires of Baal?”

O King! when Baal's dark reign is o'er,  
When thou thyself art gone,  
This fire will light the Irish shore  
And lead its people on.  
Will lead them on full many a night  
Through which they're doomed to go.  
Like that which led the Israelite  
From bondage and from woe.

This fire, this sacred fire of God,  
Young hearts shall bear afar  
To lands no human foot hath trod  
Beneath the Western Star.  
To lands where Faith's bright flag unfurl'd  
By those who here have knelt  
Shall give unto a newer world  
The sceptre of the Celt.

—*D. F. MacCarthy.*

## LAMENTATION OF MAC LIAG FOR KINCORA

Oh, where, Kincora ! is Brian the Great?  
And where is the beauty that once was thine?  
Oh, where are the princes and nobles that sate  
At the feast in thy halls, and drank the red wine?  
Where, oh, Kincora ?

Oh, where, Kincora ! are thy valorous lords?  
Oh, whither, thou Hospitable ! are they gone?  
Oh, where are the Dalcassians of the Golden  
Swords?  
And where are the warriors Brian led on?  
Where, oh, Kincora ?

And where is Murrough, the descendant of  
kings—  
The defeater of a hundred—the daringly brave—  
Who set but slight store by jewels and rings—  
Who swam down the torrent and laughed at its  
wave?  
Where, oh, Kincora ?

And where is Donogh, King Brian's worthy son?  
And where is Conaing, the Beautiful Chief?  
And Kian, and Corc ? Alas ! they are gone—  
They have left me this night alone with my grief !  
Left me, Kincora !

And where are the chiefs with whom Brian went  
 forth,  
 The ne'er-vanquished son of Evin the Brave,  
 The great King of Onaght, renowned for his  
 worth,  
 And the hosts of Baskinn, from the western wave?  
 Where, oh, Kincora?

Oh, where is Duvlann of the Swift-footed Steeds?  
 And where is Kian, who was son of Molloy?  
 And where is King Lonergan, the fame of whose  
 deeds  
 In the red battle-field no time can destroy?  
 Where, oh, Kincora?

And where is that youth of majestic height,  
 The faith-keeping Prince of the Scots?—Even he,  
 As wide as his fame was, as great as was his  
 might,  
 Was tributary, oh, Kincora, to thee!  
 Thee, oh, Kincora!

They are gone, those heroes of royal birth,  
 Who plundered no churches, and broke no trust,  
 'Tis weary for me to be living on earth  
 When they, oh, Kincora, lie low in the dust!  
 Low, oh, Kincora!

Oh, never again will Princes appear,  
 To rival the Dalcassians of the Cleaving Swords !  
 I can never dream of meeting afar or anear,  
 In the east or the west, such heroes and lords !  
                     Never, Kincora !

Oh, dear are the images my memory calls up  
 Of Brian Boru !—how he never would miss  
 To give me at the banquet the first bright cup !  
 Ah ! why did he heap on me honour like this ?  
                     Why, oh, Kincora ?

I am Mac Liag, and my home is on the Lake ;  
 Thither often, to that palace whose beauty is fled,  
 Came Brian to ask me, and I went for his sake.  
 Oh, my grief ! that I should live, and Brian be  
             dead !

Dead, oh, Kincora !

—*James Clarence Mangan.*

## THE FAITHFUL NORMAN

Praise to the valiant and faithful foe !

Give us noble foes, not the friend who lies !  
We dread the drugged cup, not the open blow :  
We dread the old hate in the new disguise.

To Ossory's king they had pledged their word :  
He stood in their camp and their pledge they  
broke ;  
Then Maurice the Norman upraised his sword ;  
The cross on its hilt he kissed and spoke :

“ So long as this sword or this arm hath might,  
I swear by the cross which is lord of all,  
By the faith and honour of noble and knight,  
Who touches you, Prince, by this hand shall  
fall.”

So side by side through the throng they pass'd  
And Eire gave praise to the just and true.  
Brave foe ! the past truth heals at last :  
There is room in the great heart of Eire for  
you !

—*Aubrey de Vere.*

## O'RUAIRC'S REQUEST

You ask me what defence is mine? Here ! 'midst  
your armed bands !

You only mock the prisoner who is helpless in  
your hands.

What would defence avail to me though good it  
be and true,

Here ! in the heart of London town, with judges  
such as you?

You gravely talk about my " crime " ! I own  
no crime at all ;

The deeds you blame I'd do again should such a  
chance befall.

You say I've helped the foreign foes to war  
against your Queen—

Well, challenged so, I'll proudly show what has  
my helping been.

On that wild day when near our coast the stately  
ships of Spain,

Caught in a fierce and sudden storm, for safety  
sought in vain ;

When wrenched and torn 'midst mountain waves  
some foundered in the deep,

And others broke on sunken reefs and headlands  
rough and steep—

I heard the cry that off my land where breakers  
rise and roar

The sailors from a wrecking ship were striving for  
the shore.

I hurried to the frightful scene, my generous  
people, too,

Men, women, even children, came, some kindly  
deed to do.

We saw them clutching spars and planks that  
soon were washed away,

Saw others bleeding on the rocks, low moaning  
where they lay ;

Some cast ashore and back again dragged by the  
refluent wave,

Whom one grip from a friendly hand would have  
sufficed to save.

We rushed into the raging surf, watched every  
chance, and when

They rose and rolled within our reach we grasped  
the drowning men.

We took them to our hearths and homes and bade  
them there remain

Till they might leave with hope to reach their  
native land again.

This is the " treason " you have charged !  
Well, treason let it be,

One word of sorrow for such fault you'll never  
hear from me.

I'll only say although you hate my race, and  
creed, and name,

Were your folk in that dreadful plight I would  
have done the same.

Oh ! you would bring me to your Queen, low at  
her feet to kneel,

Crave mercy from her stony heart, and urge some  
mean appeal !

I answer, No ! My knees will bend and prayers  
of mine arise

To but one Queen, the Queen of Heaven, high  
throned above the skies.

And now you ask my dying wish ? My last and  
sole request

Is that the scaffold built for me be fronted to the  
West.

Of my dear country far away, one glimpse I  
cannot see,

Wherever, and however high, you raise my  
gallows tree ;

Yet would I wish my last fond look should seek  
that distant shore,

So, turn my face to Ireland. Sirs, of you I ask  
no more.

—*T. D. Sullivan.*

## SARSFIELD'S RIDE

'Twas the calm hush of night: all silently we  
    sped  
From the city's battered walls, Patrick Sarsfield  
    at our head;  
Nor wondered why 'twas so, for we knew his  
    heart was true  
And he'd ask from us but all that Irishmen  
    should do.

Past 'leaguered Killaloe through the friendly  
    gloom we dashed,  
And across the Shannontide like a swift storm-  
    cloud we flashed,  
On o'er spreading bog and plain through the  
    netted Saxon lines,  
Till we shelter won within thy steep valley,  
    Silvermines!

There till day had come and gone kept we wary  
    bivouac,  
Till the shadows o'er the hills gathered heavily  
    and black,  
Then our saddle-trees again sought we, hushed  
    and few our words—  
We tightened up our horsegirths and loosened  
    well our swords.

Forward, silent as we might, and by Ballyneety's  
fane

Saw the watchfires of the foe glare against the  
gloomy plain.

“ Comrades ! yonder,” cried our chief, “ lie the  
Dutchman's vaunted powers,

Charge for all that we hold dear, as one man,  
and they are ours !”

Like a thunderbolt we burst on the sleeping  
Saxon horde,

Flashed a moment 'gainst their fires helm,  
corselet and sword,

To the sentinel's hoarse cry quick our leader's  
answer ran,

“ Sarsfield is the word and Patrick Sarsfield is  
the man !”

Roused the sleepers as if woke by th' Archangel's  
trumpet-blast,

Grasped their swords with nerveless hands, met  
our onset all aghast ;

As a wintry torrent tears rock and tree before  
its wrath,

So we, vengeful, bearing on, swept the Saxon  
from our path.

Their treasures, powder-gorged, made we ready  
then full soon,  
Piled them high together all, mortar, cannon, and  
pontoon,  
Skyward sprang a lurid flame, rose before us glen  
and hill,  
Then from Shannon-side to Suir shook the land  
with giant thrill.

And away with rending shriek sprang into the  
shuddering air  
Gun and mortar; echoing rang back the mist-  
clad hills of Clare.  
O'er dim, frowning Gailte Mor peeped the  
wakening morning sun  
As we hied us Shannonward, for our missioned  
work was done.

—*William Rooney.*

## THE BLACKSMITH OF LIMERICK

He grasped his ponderous hammer ; he could not  
stand it more,  
To hear the bombshells bursting and the thunder-  
ing battle's roar.  
He said : " The breach they're mounting, the  
Dutchman's murdering crew—  
I'll try my hammer on their heads and see what  
that can do ! "

" Now, swarthy Ned and Moran, make up that  
iron well ;  
'Tis Sarsfield's horse that wants the shoes, so  
mind not shot or shell." "  
" Ah, sure," cried both, " the horse can wait—  
for Sarsfield's on the wall,  
And where you go we'll follow, with you to stand  
or fall ! "

The blacksmith raised his hammer, and rushed  
into the street,  
His 'prentice boys behind him, the ruthless foe  
to meet—  
High on the breach of Limerick, with dauntless  
hearts they stood,  
Where the bombshells burst and shot fell thick  
and redly ran the blood.

“ Now look, you brown-haired Moran, and mark  
you, swarthy Ned ;  
This day we'll prove the thickness of many a  
Dutchman's head !  
Hurrah ! upon their bloody path they're mount-  
ing gallantly ;  
And now the first that tops the breach, leave him  
to this and me ! ”

The first that gained the rampart, he was a captain  
brave !  
A captain of the Grenadiers, with blood-stained  
dirk and glaive ;  
He pointed and he parried, but it was all  
in vain,  
For fast through skull and helmet the hammer  
found his brain !

The next that topped the rampart, he was a  
colonel bold,  
Bright through the murk of battle, his helmet  
flashed with gold.  
“ Gold is no match for iron ! ” the doughty black-  
smith said,  
As with that ponderous hammer he cracked his  
foeman's head !

“ Hurrah for gallant Limerick ! ” black Ned and  
Moran cried,  
As on the Dutchmen’s leaden heads their ham-  
mers well they plied ;  
A bombshell burst between them—one fell with-  
out a groan,  
One leaped into the lurid air, and down the  
breach was thrown !

“ Brave smith ! brave smith ! ” cried Sarsfield,  
“ beware the treacherous mine—  
Brave smith, brave smith, fall backward, or  
surely death is thine ” ;  
The smith sprang up the rampart, and leaped the  
blood-stained wall,  
As high into the shuddering air went foeman,  
breach, and all !

Up like a red volcano they thundered wild and  
high,  
Spear, gun, and shattered standard, and foemen  
through the sky ;  
And dark and bloody was the shower that round  
the blacksmith fell—  
He though upon his ’prentice boys, they were  
avenged well !

On foemen and defenders a silence gathered  
down,  
'Twas broken by a triumph shout that shook the  
ancient town ;  
As out its heroes sallied, and bravely charged and  
slew,  
And taught King William and his men what Irish  
hearts can do !

Down rushed the swarthy blacksmith unto the  
river side,  
He hammered on the foes' pontoon, to sink it in  
the tide ;  
The timber it was tough and strong, it took no  
crack or strain—  
“ *Mo bhrón*, 't won't break,” the blacksmith  
roared, “ I'll try their heads again !”

The blacksmith sought his smithy, and blew his  
bellows strong ;  
He shod the steed of Sarsfield, but o'er it sang  
no song ;  
“ *Ochone!* my boys are dead,” he cried ; “ their  
loss I'll long deplore,  
But comfort's in my heart—their graves are red  
with foreign gore !”

—*R. D. Joyce.*

## AFTER THE BATTLE

(AUGHRIM, 1691)

Night closed around the conqueror's way,  
And lightnings showed the distant hill,  
Where those who lost that dreadful day  
Stood few and faint but fearless still !  
The soldier's hope, the patriot's zeal,  
For ever dimmed, for ever crossed—  
Oh ! who shall say what heroes feel,  
When all but life and honour's lost ?

The last sad hour of Freedom's dream  
And valour's task moved slowly by,  
While mute they watched, till morning's beam  
Should rise and give them light to die.  
There's yet a world where souls are free,  
Where tyrants taint not nature's bliss ;  
If death that world's bright opening be :  
Oh ! who would live a slave in this ?

--*Thomas Moore.*

## THE DOG OF AUGHRIM

“ The day is ours, my gallant men ! ” cried  
brave, but vain St. Ruth ;

“ We’ve won a deathless victory for Liberty and  
Truth ;

We’ll wrest the land from William’s grasp though  
we’re but one to three,

We’ll make his crew remember long the Pass of  
Urrachree ;

“ That though with myriad cannon they poured  
the fierce attack,

Still with valour and the naked sword thrice have  
we flung them back.

They’re beaten, boys ! they’re beaten ! still  
unsheath your swords again,

And—on them like an avalanche ! and sweep  
them from the plain.”

Like thunderbolt upon the foe the Irish column  
sped,

Athlone’s deep stain to wash away—St. Ruth is  
at their head.

On ! onward rolls that wave of death ; but, God !  
what means this cry ?

St. Ruth the brave sits on his charger headless  
’neath the sky.

Oh ! where's the gallant Sarsfield now, is victory  
defeat?

O, God in mercy, strike us dead ; 'twere better  
than retreat.

Oh ! where is Limerick's hero brave? the chief-  
less soldiers cry,

And scorning flight they wait the dawn to give  
them light to die.

No quarter ! was the slogan of the Williamites  
that day—

And graveless lay the murdered brave, to dogs  
and thieves a prey ;

And even dogs more sacred held the dying and  
the slain,

Than Ginckle and his hireling hordes on  
Aughrim's bloody plain.

When Saxon fiends the scene of death and  
robbery had fled

An Irish wolf-dog sought his lord 'mid heaps of  
pilfered dead,

And strove with more than human love to rob  
death of its prize,

Then moaned a dirge above his breast and kissed  
his lips and eyes.

The summer sun shone fiercely down upon the  
corpse-strewn plain,  
Where bird and beast of air and field devoured  
the naked slain ;  
Yet faithful still that wolf-dog stood 'mid savage  
growls and groans,  
To guard alike from man and beast his well-loved  
master's bones.

When Autumn pencilled Summer's bloom in tints  
of gold and red,  
And Winter over hill and dale a ghostly mantle  
spread,  
The weird winds wailed across the moor and  
moaned adown the dell—  
Yet guarded well that noble dog his master where  
he fell.

Spring timidly was glancing down upon the  
spreading plain,  
Where seven months death's sentinel the faithful  
dog had lain,  
When carelessly across the moor an English  
soldier trod  
And halted near the only bones remaining on the  
sod.

Up sprang the faithful wolf-dog, he knew a foe  
was near,  
And feared that foe would desecrate the bones  
he loved so dear ;  
Fierce and defiant there he stood, the soldier,  
seized with dread,  
Took aim, and fired—the noble dog fell on his  
master—dead.

## FONTENOY

Thrice, at the huts of Fontenoy, the English  
column failed,  
And, twice, the lines of Saint Antoine, the Dutch  
in vain assailed ;  
For town and slope were filled with fort and flank-  
ing battery,  
And well they swept the English ranks and Dutch  
auxiliary.  
As vainly, through De Barri's wood, the British  
soldiers burst,  
The French artillery drove them back,  
diminished and dispersed.  
The bloody Duke of Cumberland beheld with  
anxious eye,  
And ordered up his last reserve, his latest chance  
to try,  
On Fontenoy, on Fontenoy, how fast his generals  
ride !  
And mustering come his chosen troops, like  
clouds at eventide.

Six thousand English veterans in stately column  
tread,  
Their cannons blaze in front and flank, Lord  
Hay is at their head ;

Steady they step adown the slope, steady they  
climb the hill ;  
Steady they load, steady they fire, moving right  
onward still,  
Betwixt the wood and Fontenoy, as through a  
furnace blast,  
Through rampart, trench, and palisade, and  
bullets showering fast ;  
And on the open plain above they rose and kept  
their course,  
With ready fire and grim resolve that mocked at  
hostile force :  
Past Fontenoy, past Fontenoy, while thinner  
grow their ranks,  
They break, as broke the Zuyder Zee through  
Holland's ocean banks.

More idly than the summer flies French tirailleurs  
rush round,  
As stubble to the lava tide French squadrons  
strew the ground ;  
Bomb-shell, and grape, and round shot tore, still  
on they marched and fired—  
Fast from each volley grenadier and voltigeur  
retired.  
“ Push on, my household cavalry ! ” King Louis  
madly cried :  
To death they rush, but rude their shock, not  
unavenged they died.

On through the camp the column trod—King  
Louis turns his rein :

“ Not yet, my liege,” Saxe interposed, “ the  
Irish troops remain ” ;

And Fontenoy, famed Fontenoy, had been a  
Waterloo,

Were not these exiles ready then, fresh,  
vehement, and true.

“ Lord Clare,” he says, “ you have your wish :  
there are your Saxon foes ! ”

The Marshal almost smiles to see, so furiously  
he goes !

How fierce the look these exiles wear, who're  
wont to be so gay,

The treasured wrongs of fifty years are in their  
hearts to-day—

The treaty broken ere the ink wherewith 'twas  
writ could dry,

Their plundered homes, their ruined shrines,  
their women's parting cry,

Their priesthood hunted down like wolves, their  
country overthrown—

Each looks as if revenge for all were staked on  
him alone,

On Fontenoy, on Fontenoy, nor ever yet else-  
where,

Rushed on to fight a nobler band than these proud  
exiles were.

O'Brien's voice is hoarse with joy, as, halting,  
he commands,

“ Fix bay'nets ! charge ! ” Like mountain storm,  
rush on these fiery bands !

Thin is the English column now, and faint their  
volleys grow,

Yet, must'ring all the strength they have, they  
make a gallant show.

They dress their ranks upon the hill to face that  
battle-wind—

Their bayonets the breakers' foam ; like rocks  
the men behind !

One volley crashes from their line, when, through  
the surging smoke,

With empty guns clutched in their hands, the  
headlong Irish broke.

On Fontenoy, on Fontenoy, hark to that fierce  
huzza !

“ Revenge ! remember Limerick ! dash down  
the Sassanach ! ”

Like lions leaping at a fold, when mad with  
hunger's pang,

Right up against the English line the Irish exiles  
sprang :

Bright was their steel, 'tis bloody now, their guns  
are filled with gore,

Through shattered ranks and severed files the  
trampled flags they tore ;

The English strove with desperate strength,  
    paused, rallied, staggered, fled—

The green hillside is matted close with dying and  
    with dead.

Across the plain, and far away passed on that  
    hideous wrack,

While cavalier and fantassin dash in upon their  
    track.

On Fontenoy, on Fontenoy, like eagles in the  
    sun,

With bloody plumes the Irish stand, the field is  
    fought and won.

—*Thomas Davis.*

## THE MEMORY OF THE DEAD

Who fears to speak of Ninety-Eight?

Who blushes at the name?

When cowards mock the patriot's fate,

Who hangs his head for shame?

He's all a knave or half a slave

Who slights his country thus :

But a true man, like you, man,

Will fill your glass with us.

We drink the memory of the brave,

The faithful and the few—

Some lie far off beyond the wave,

Some sleep in Ireland, too ;

All, all are gone—but still lives on

The fame of those who died ;

And true men, like you, men,

Remember them with pride.

Some on the shores of distant lands

Their weary hearts have laid,

And by the stranger's heedless hands

Their lonely graves were made ;

But though their clay be far away

Beyond the Atlantic foam,

In true men, like you, men,

Their spirit's still at home.

The dust of some is Irish earth ;  
Among their own they rest ;  
And the same land that gave them birth  
Has caught them to her breast ;  
And we will pray that from their clay  
Full many a race may start  
Of true men, like you, men,  
To act as brave a part.

They rose in dark and evil days  
To right their native land ;  
They kindled here a living blaze  
That nothing shall withstand.  
Alas ! that Might can vanquish Right—  
They fell, and passed away ;  
But true men, like you, men,  
Are plenty here to-day.

Then here's their memory—may it be  
For us a guiding light,  
To cheer our strife for liberty,  
And teach us to unite !  
Through good and ill, be Ireland's still,  
Though sad as theirs, your fate ;  
And true men, be you, men,  
Like those of Ninety-Eight.

—*John Kells Ingram.*

## THE CROPPY BOY

“ Good men and true ! in this house who dwell,  
To a stranger bouchal, I pray you tell  
Is the priest at home? or may he be seen?  
I would speak a word with Father Green.”

“ The priest’s at home, boy, and may be seen,  
’Tis easy speaking with Father Green ;  
But you must wait till I go and see  
If the holy father alone may be.”

The youth had entered an empty hall—  
What a lonely sound has his light foot-fall !  
And the gloomy chamber’s chill and bare,  
With a vested priest in a lonely chair.

The youth has knelt to tell his sins ;  
“ Nomine Dei,” the youth begins :  
’At “ mea culpa ” he beats his breast,  
And in broken murmurs he speaks the rest.

“ At the siege of Ross did my father fall,  
’And at Gorey my loving brothers all,  
I alone am left of my name and race,  
I will go to Wexford and take their place.

“ I cursed three times since last Easter Day—  
At Mass-time once I went to play ;  
I passed the churchyard one day in haste,  
And forgot to pray for my mother’s rest.

“ I bear no hate against living thing ;  
But I love my country above my King.  
Now, Father ! bless me, and let me go  
To die, if God has ordained it so.”

The priest said naught, but a rustling noise  
Made the youth look above in wild surprise :  
The robes were off, and in scarlet there  
Sat a yeoman captain with fiery glare.

With fiery glare and with fury hoarse,  
Instead of a blessing he breathed a curse :—  
“ ’Twas a good thought, boy, to come here and  
    shrive,  
For one short hour is your time to live.

“ Upon yon river three tenders float,  
The priest’s in one, if he isn’t shot—  
We hold this house for our Lord the King,  
And, amen, say I, may all traitors swing !”

At Geneva Barrack that young man died,  
And at Passage they have his body laid :  
Good people who live in peace and joy,  
Breathe a prayer and a tear for the Croppy Boy.

—*Carroll Malone.*

## MICHAEL DWYER

“ At length, brave Michael Dwyer, you and your  
trusty men  
Are hunted o’er the mountains and tracked into  
the glen.  
Sleep not, but watch and listen ; keep ready blade  
and ball ;  
The soldiers know you’re hiding to-night in wild  
Imaal.”

The soldiers searched the valley, and towards the  
dawn of day  
Discovered where the outlaws, the dauntless  
rebels, lay.  
Around the little cottage they formed into a ring  
And called out, “ Michael Dwyer ! surrender to  
the King.”

Thus answered Michael Dwyer : “ Into this  
house we came  
Unasked by those who own it—they cannot be  
to blame.  
Then let these peaceful people unquestioned pass  
you through,  
And when they’re placed in safety, I’ll tell you  
what we’ll do.”

'Twas done. "And now," said Dwyer, "your  
work you may begin :  
You are a hundred outside—we're only four  
within.  
We've heard your haughty summons, and this is  
our reply—  
We're true United Irishmen, we'll fight until we  
die."

Then burst the war's red lightning, then poured  
the leaden rain,  
The hills around re-echoed the thunder peals  
again.  
The soldiers falling round him brave Dwyer sees  
with pride ;  
But, ah ! one gallant comrade is wounded by his  
side.

Yet there are three remaining good battle still  
to do ;  
Their hands are strong and steady, their aim is  
quick and true—  
But hark that furious shouting the savage soldiers  
raise !  
The house is fired around them ! the roof is in  
a blaze !

And brighter every moment the lurid flame  
arose,

And louder swelled the laughter and cheering of  
their foes.

Then spake the brave MacAlister, the weak and  
wounded man :

“ You can escape, my comrades, and this shall  
be your plan :

“ Place in my hands a musket, then lie upon the  
floor ;

I'll stand before the soldiers and open wide the  
door ;

They'll pour into my bosom the fire of their  
array ;

Then, whilst their guns are empty, dash through  
them and away.”

He stood before his foemen, revealed amidst the  
flame.

From out their levelled pieces the wished-for  
volley came ;

Up sprang the three survivors for whom the hero  
died,

But only Michael Dwyer broke through the ranks  
outside.

He baffled his pursuers, who followed like the  
wind ;

He swam the river Slaney, and left them far  
behind ;

But many an English soldier he promised soon  
should fall

For these his gallant comrades, who died in wild  
Imaal.

—*T. D. Sullivan.*

# THE WINDING BANKS OF ERNE

*or*

## THE EMIGRANT'S ADIEU TO HIS BIRTHPLACE

Adieu to Belashanny, where I was bred and  
born ;

Go where I may I'll think of you, as sure as night  
and morn :

The kindly spot, the friendly town, where every  
one is known,

And not a face in all the place but partly seems  
my own ;

There's not a house or window, there's not a field  
or hill,

But east or west, in foreign lands, I'll recollect  
them still ;

I leave my warm heart with you, though my back  
I'm forced to turn—

Adieu to Belashanny, and the winding banks of  
Erne !

No more on pleasant evenings we'll saunter down  
the Mall,

When the trout is rising to the fly, the salmon to  
the fall.

The boat comes straining on her net, and heavily  
she creeps,

Cast off, cast off—she feels the oars, and to her  
berth she sweeps ;

Now fore and aft keep hauling, and gathering up  
the clew,  
Till a silver wave of salmon rolls in among the  
crew,  
Then they may sit, with pipes a-lit, and many a  
joke and ' yarn ' :—  
Adieu to Belashanny, and the winding banks of  
Erne !

The music of the waterfall, the mirror of the  
tide,  
When all the green-hill'd harbour is full from side  
to side,  
From Portnasun to Bulliebawns, and round the  
Abbey Bay,  
From rocky Inis Saimer to Coolnargit sandhills  
grey ;  
While far upon the southern line, to guard it  
like a wall,  
The Leitrim mountains, clothed in blue, gaze  
calmly over all,  
And watch the ship sail up or down, the red flag  
at her stern—  
Adieu to these, adieu to all the winding banks of  
Erne !

Farewell to you, Kildoney lads, and them that  
pull an oar,  
A lugsail set, or haul a net, from the Point to  
Mullaghmore ;

From Killybegs to bold Slieve-League, that  
ocean-mountain steep,  
Six hundred yards in air aloft, six hundred in the  
deep ;  
From Dooran to the Fairy Bridge, and round by  
Tullen strand,  
Level and long, and white with waves, where gull  
and curlew stand ;  
Head out to sea, when on your lee the breakers  
you discern—  
Adieu to all the billowy coast and winding banks  
of Erne !

Farewell Coolmore, Bundoran ! and your summer  
crowds that run  
From inland homes to see with joy th' Atlantic-  
setting sun ;  
To breathe the buoyant salted air, and sport  
among the waves ;  
To gather shells on sandy beach, and tempt the  
gloomy caves ;  
To watch the flowing ebbing tide, the boats, the  
crabs, the fish ;  
Young men and maids to meet and smile, and  
form a tender wish ;  
The sick and old in search of health, for all things  
have their turn—  
And I must quit my native shore and the winding  
banks of Erne !

Farewell to every white cascade from the  
Harbour to Belleek,  
And every pool where fins may rest, and ivy-  
shaded creek ;  
The sloping fields, the lofty rocks, where ash and  
holly grow,  
The one split yew-tree gazing on the curving  
flood below ;  
The Lough, that winds through islands under  
Turaw mountain green ;  
And Castle Caldwell's stretching woods, with  
tranquil bays between ;  
And Breesie Hill, and many a pond among the  
heath and fern—  
For I must say adieu—adieu to the winding banks  
of Erne !

The thrush will call through Camlin groves the  
livelong summer day ;  
The waters run by mossy cliff, and banks with  
wild flowers gay ;  
The girls will bring their work and sing beneath  
a twisted thorn,  
Or stray with sweethearts down the path among  
the growing corn ;  
Along the riverside they go, where I have often  
been,  
Oh, never shall I see again the days that I have  
seen !

A thousand chances are to one I never may  
return—

Adieu to Belashanny, and the winding banks of  
Erne !

Adieu to evening dances, when merry neighbours  
meet,

And the fiddle says to boys and girls, “ Get up  
and shake your feet ” !

To shanachas and wise old talk of Erin’s days  
gone by—

Who trench’d the rath on such a hill, and where  
the bones may lie.

Of saint or king, or warrior chief ; with tales of  
fairy power,

And tender ditties sweetly sung to pass the  
twilight hour.

The mournful song of exile is now for me to  
learn—

Adieu, my dear companions on the winding  
banks of Erne !

Now measure from the Commons down to each  
end of the Purt,

Round the Abbey, Moy, and Knather,—I wish  
no one any hurt ;

The Main Street, Back Street, College Lane, the  
Mall and Portnasun,

If any foes of mine are there, I pardon every  
one.

I hope that man and womankind will do the same  
by me ;

For my heart is sore and heavy at voyaging the  
sea.

My loving friends I'll bear in mind, and often  
fondly turn,

To think of Belashanny, and the winding banks  
of Erne !

If ever I'm a moneyed man, I mean, please God,  
to cast

My golden anchor in the place where youthful  
years were past ;

Though heads that now are black and brown must  
meanwhile gather grey,

New faces rise by every hearth, and old ones  
drop away—

Yet dearer still that Irish hill than all the world  
beside ;

It's home, sweet home, where'er I roam, through  
lands and waters wide.

And if the Lord allows me, I surely will  
return—

To my native Belashanny, and the winding banks  
of Erne !

—*W. Allingham.*

## NOTES

### THE DEATH OF KING CONOR MAC NESSA

(1 A.D.)

The glories of Pagan Ireland are pictured in this interesting legend of Ulster. Conor Mac Nessa, King of Ulster about the first century, was the central figure of the heroic deeds of the Red Branch Knights. Wounded in a raiding expedition into Connaught, he was compelled to lead a retired life, for owing to the nature of his injury any excitement was bound to prove fatal. The chaos which prevailed over the world during the agony of Our Saviour roused the monarch to action. Questioning the Druid Barach as to the cause of the earthly convulsions, he learned of the death of the Saviour on the Cross, and wild with rage at such injustice, he seized his sword and rushing out, vowed vengeance on the reprobates who had crucified his Lord. In that moment of excitement the brain-ball of Mesgedra started in his head and King Conor fell dead.

### EXERCISES

1. What were the restrictions laid down by the court physician, Fingen, when King Conor was wounded?
2. How did Barach account for the sudden commotion that made the earth tremble?
3. What do you learn from the poem about life in the royal court of the period?
4. Quote any descriptive lines that appeal to you.
5. Select examples of rhyme from the poem.

## THE BURIAL OF KING CORMAC (277 A.D.)

The Pagan era in Irish History is again represented in this legend of the burial of King Cormac, one of the greatest rulers of his time. According to historians, he is said to have died a Christian and to have been buried in Rossnaree, instead of in Brugh, the burial-ground of all his royal ancestors.

Ferguson has treated the tradition with great artistry and poetic power in this ballad. The passing away of the old order of Paganism is foreshadowed and the advent of a brighter future is indicated. The opening stanzas of the poem are scarcely as successful as the major portion of the narrative; after the first five stanzas, however, the artificiality disappears and pure poetry takes its place. Themes which are especially happily treated are Cormac's commands before his death and the description of the river Boyne in flood. The former passages are in simple words and yet have a force and majesty which is felt instinctively; the latter section exhibits a mastery of reserve coupled with unusual imaginative power. In a few bold lines the picture of the raging river is complete, and what detail would have weakened is strengthened by this reticent method. Note, too, the emphatic effect produced by the alliterative words, "*mossy moorland*," "*broad and brown*" (*alliteration* is the recurrence of the same initial letter in words closely connected), while the line: "'Neath blackening squalls he swelled and boiled" is a vivid picture of the seething river.

After the description of the gigantic struggle against the stormy currents come the quiet and calm of the

closing scene, when Cormac's coffin is found and interred at Rossnaree, where, lulled by the ever youthful stream, he awaits the dawn of a brighter day.

*Crom Cruach.* According to legend, the chief idol of druidical Ireland, standing on the Plain of Adoration, in Co. Cavan of to-day, Magh Sléachtana, which Ferguson calls Moy Slaughter, adding the epithet *red*, to indicate the slaughter of victims to the god.

*Treene.* Obsolete plural of trees; *carven*, for carved; *helve*, the portion of the haft or handle, which fits into the head of the tool; *Had . . . . been*, pluperf. subjunctive, would have been worthier of our worship during these years past; *axe . . . . haft or helve*, i.e., the axe, or even any part of the axe.\*

*Word of the words.* Word was brought of the words which King Cormac had said. This is, at best, a difficult passage to understand, and even when understood leaves an iteration of sound which displeases the ear, owing to the repetition, "word—words," at so short an interval.

*Mystic ring.* Probably the ring or cromlech marked out by the druidical stones deposited in the field of worship, whose disposition and use have so much puzzled antiquarians. It is said that even down to our own times peasants in one part or other of Ireland have, according, apparently, to tradition, turned such stones from their usual positions when cursing others.

*Sate—ate.* These are only *printer's rhymes* nowadays, i.e., they rhyme to the eye alone, not to the ear.

*Sletty.* Cleiteach, as above.

*Should.* Had still to obey, were still bound to obey.

*Brugh.* On the north bank of the Boyne; the chief cemetery of the ancient Kings of Ireland at this date.

*Rossnarce.* On the Boyne, some distance below the Bridge of Slane.

*A breath of finer air.* A very tasteful introduction of the supernatural element, so much used in ballad poetry.

*Shows.* Probably not "manifestations of grief," as some suggest, but 'funeral games,' or exhibitions.

*Gentle.* Heathen, not Christian.

*Dread-Spear.* Aengus of Deise Mumhan. Deise Mumhain takes in both Waterford and Tipperary. Deise Breagh is Deece, in Meath.

*Brave.* Fine to view.

*Justing.* Tilting at a ring suspended as a mark for the lance.

*The dawn delays with tenderer beam.* The idea being that with Cormac lie buried Ireland's hopes for better things. An exquisitely beautiful line, impossible to surpass.

*Only dawning day.* As yet we have only the premonition of our country's salvation; we still await the sun-burst.

The poem may be well known as the ballad of the Boyne, the description of which it would be well to commit to memory, as these stanzas constitute fine poetry, and lend themselves to effective quotation.

### EXERCISES

1. Quote or give the substance of King Cormac's speech, beginning: "Spread not the beds of Brugh for me."

2. What reasons are given by Cormac's captains for not carrying out their king's commands? Do you think these reasons are sufficient to justify their action?

3. Describe the attempt to bring King Cormac's coffin to Brugh.

4. Suggest a title for the following verses. Do you notice any similar stanzas in the ballad you have studied? Quote them if possible.

A clear pure air pervades the scene,  
In loneliness and awe secure;  
Meet spot to sepulchre a Queen  
Who in her life was pure.

Here, far from camp and chase removed,  
Apart in Nature's quiet room,  
The music that alive she loved  
Shall cheer her in the tomb.

The humming of the noontide bees,  
The lark's loud carol all day long,  
And, borne on the evening's salted breeze,  
The clanking sea-bird's song

Shall round her airy chamber float,  
And with the whispering winds and streams  
Attune to Nature's tenderest note  
The tenor of her dreams.

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## THE PASCHAL FIRE OF PATRICK

(432 A.D.)

As we have learned in the foregoing ballad, King Cormac Mac Airt is presumed to have died a Christian, and it is fairly accurate to suppose that the Christian faith had found a footing in parts of Ireland before the coming of St. Patrick in 432. In that year the great event—the conversion of the Irish to the Christian faith—began. The incident which marked the opening campaign of Patrick's mission is briefly described in

MacCarthy's poem. By command of the High-King, Laoghaire, no fire was to be lighted in the surrounding country till the Pagan rite, which began with the kindling of a great fire, was inaugurated at Tara. To his amazement, however, the king saw a bright blaze on the Hill of Slane, which was visible from Tara. This was the Paschal fire lit by St. Patrick and his brother missionaries. They were summoned to appear immediately before the king. St. Patrick in this interview declared his mission—to fight the doctrines of Paganism and to preach the Gospel of the Christian faith.

The poem gives the main points of the incident in summary fashion; a dramatic quality is lent to the verse by the direct words introduced; the description of the event is not in detail, but the terse method employed is suggestive and vivid.

*On Tara's hill the daylight dies.* This and the following line describe very concisely and at the same time picturesquely the fall of evening.

*Baal's unkindled fires.* Baal was one of the gods adored by the Pagans. Here the name symbolises Paganism.

### EXERCISES

1. Explain the following phrases: (a) The Paschal fire is lit; (b) When Baal's dark reign is o'er.
2. Write a short essay on "St. Patrick in Ireland."
3. Write an imaginative account of the interview in which King Laoghaire questions St. Patrick as to his mission.

## LAMENTATION OF MAC LIAG FOR KINCORA (1014 A.D.)

The great and glorious victory of Clontarf was rendered useless by the death of Brian Boru, and once again the nation became a fighting-ground for claimants for the Ardri-ship. There followed a period of turmoil during which the forces that King Brian had strengthened were spent and weakened. Mac Liag, who was Brian's secretary, looks upon the ruins of Kincora and mourns for the great king and his family. Note the refrain which concludes each stanza; it is a favourite device of Mangan's, and the melodious effect it produces is unmistakable.

This refrain is used with still greater harmonious results in his poem, "The Karamanian Exile"; the musical repetition, "Karaman," sounding like an echo through the stanza :

I see thee ever in my dreams,  
Karaman!  
Thy hundred hills, thy thousand streams,  
Karaman! O Karaman!  
As when thy gold-bright morning gleams,  
As when the deepening sunset seams,  
With lines of light thy hills and streams,  
Karaman!  
So thou loomest on my dreams,  
Karaman! O Karaman!

### EXERCISES

1. Mention the names of some of the heroic Irishmen for whom Mac Liag laments in this poem, and give an account of one of them.

2. Quote your favourite stanza and give reasons for your selection.

3. Have you read any other poems with a refrain? Quote, if possible.

## THE FAITHFUL NORMAN

(1169 A.D.)

We now pass to a very sad event in our history—the Anglo-Norman Invasion and the subsequent dominance of the foreigner in our country. The year 1169 saw the Norman adventurers come to our shores with the treacherous Irish Prince, Dermott Mac Murrough, and there followed an era of bloodshed and misery. The incident described by De Vere is an admirable example of chivalrous honour in the midst of faithlessness and deceit.

Maurice de Prendergast was sent by Strongbow to invite Mac Giolla Patrick, Prince of Ossory, to a conference in the Norman camp. Prendergast agreed to prevail on the Irish chief to accept the invitation, on condition that Strongbow gave him a solemn pledge that the chief should be dealt with in good faith, and that he should be assured a safe entry and return. Strongbow agreed to the conditions, and Prendergast went on his mission, and was successful in bringing the Prince to the Norman camp. During the conference Prendergast perceived that treachery was about to be used towards the Prince of Ossory. He immediately confronted Strongbow and swore that he who laid hands on the Prince should die. The conference completed, the gallant Norman rode out of the camp, with sword in hand, by the side of the Irish Chief, whom he conducted to his own territory in safety. He had kept his word !

## EXERCISES

1. Could you quote or give the substance of any other poem which treats of the chivalrous conduct of an

enemy? Read "Orange and Green," by Gerald Griffin; it will be found in several school texts.

2. Do you admire Maurice de Prendergast? Point out admirable qualities in his character indicated in the poem.

3. Write a short essay on "chivalry."

4. "The peculiarity of the ballad is that it refers to an incident with which the audience is supposed to be acquainted, and does not give a methodical recitation of the facts. . . ." Is this true of the ballad, "The Faithful Norman"?

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### O'RUAIRC'S REQUEST (1589 A.D.)

This is a ballad of a stirring, rousing type; it carries us to the reign of Queen Elizabeth, an era of exceptional hardship in this country. During her reign the long projected invasion of England by Spain was attempted, but proved futile. Large numbers of the Spanish ships were lost off the coasts of Ireland and Scotland, and O'Ruairc, Prince of Breifne, in giving aid to the wrecked Spaniards, was considered a traitor to the English Queen. His spirited defence and proud disdainful bearing in the midst of merciless foes are worthy of remembrance. The language of the poem is vivid and animated and makes the ballad an easy one to memorise.

### EXERCISES

1. Paraphrase the stanza beginning: "On that wild day when near our coast the stately ships of Spain."

2. Select lines from the poem which show O'Ruairc's nobility of character.

## SARSFIELD'S RIDE

(1690 A.D.)

An eventful century intervenes between the episode of O'Ruairc's imprisonment and this ballad of Sarsfield's Ride. Meantime, the Rebellion of 1641 had proved unsuccessful, and the country had some years later been ravaged by Cromwell. With the Restoration of Charles II the Catholic population of this country received a short-lived toleration, followed by a period of extreme severity, but when James II succeeded his brother Charles, Irish hopes were high, for James was a Catholic. James, however, was deposed from the English throne in 1688 and William of Orange, a Dutch prince, was invited to take his place by the English Parliament. In England the new ruler met with little opposition, but in Ireland he had to fight inch by inch before he succeeded in establishing his authority. The siege of Limerick was one of the most important events of his campaign here. The ballad describes Sarsfield's daring ride to intercept a siege train which was bringing war materials to the Williamite camp.

It would be advisable when studying this ballad to read poems dealing with other famous historical rides: "Paul Revere's Ride," by Longfellow; Browning's "Ride from Ghent to Aix," and "Sheridan's Ride," by Thomas Buchanan Read.

## EXERCISES

1. Give a short summary of Rooney's poem, "Sarsfield's Ride."

2. The poem we give here is a different version of Sarsfield's Ride by Aubrey de Vere. Read it carefully and contrast it with Rooney's ballad. Which poem

gives the greater detail in describing the incident? Which is the more realistic? Which has the quicker movement? Which treatment do you prefer? Give reasons for your choice.

### A BALLAD OF SARSFIELD

Sarsfield rode out, the Dutch to rout,  
And to take and break their cannon;  
To Mass went he at half-past three,  
And at four he crossed the Shannon.

Tyrconnell slept. In dream his thoughts  
Old fields of victory ran on;  
And the chieftains of Thomond in Limerick's towers  
Slept well by the banks of Shannon.

He rode ten miles and he crossed the ford  
And couch'd in the wood and waited;  
Till, left and right on march'd in sight  
That host which the true men hated.

"Charge!" Sarsfield cried; and the green hillside  
As they charged replied in thunder;  
They rode o'er the plain, and they rode o'er the slain  
And the rebel rout lay under!

He burn'd the gear the knaves held dear—  
For his King he fought, not plunder;  
With powder he cramm'd the guns, and ramm'd  
Their mouths the red soil under.

The spark flash'd out like a nation's shout  
The sound into heaven ascended;  
The hosts of the sky made to earth reply,  
And the thunders twain were blended!

Sarsfield rode out, the Dutch to rout,  
And to take and break their cannon;—  
A century after, Sarsfield's laughter  
Was echoed from Dungannon.

—Aubrey de Vere.

## THE BLACKSMITH OF LIMERICK

(1691 A.D.)

Another spirited song of the siege of Limerick, with just a touch of despondency towards its close. The blacksmith and his 'prentice boys fought bravely in the grim struggle in Limerick, and death reaped its due harvest. But sorrow does not conquer : the impression given by the ballad is one of vigour and strength.

## EXERCISES

1. Write a paraphrase of any stanza in the poem.
  2. Write a short description of "The Village Blacksmith."
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## AFTER THE BATTLE

(1691 A.D.)

The glories of Limerick are soon forgotten in the disaster of Aughrim, due, it is said, to the vanity and self-esteem of the French General, St. Ruth. This song, written by Moore, commemorates the tragic event with exquisite restraint and musical sweetness.

## EXERCISES

1. Select what you consider to be the most poetic lines in the two stanzas.
2. Quote lines from the poem which to you seem to express the poet's own opinions.
3. Compare the poem, "The Blacksmith of Limerick," with "After the Battle" from the following points of view : (a) subject-matter ; (b) musical language.

## THE DOG OF AUGHRIM (1691 A.D.)

The pathetic incident which is the subject of this ballad is worthy of a place in history, and is a momentary relief in the midst of grim death and ruthless warfare. The abrupt opening of the poem is especially characteristic of the ballad : it brings us to the scene of the action without any preliminary explanations. We are not told who the opposing armies may be ; that belongs to the realms of prose, not ballad poetry. You will find numerous examples of alliteration in the poem ; note the emphatic effect they give to descriptive verses :

The summer sun shone fiercely down upon the corpse-strewn plain.  
And again :

The weird winds wailed across the moor and moaned adown the dell.

### EXERCISES

1. Contrast the descriptions of the battle of Aughrim and the siege of Limerick (The Blacksmith of Limerick) and note resemblances and differences in (a) treatment ; (b) incident.
2. Explain the lines :
  - (a) Athlone's deep stain to wash away . . . .
  - (b) Oh ! where's the gallant Sarsfield now, is victory defeat?
3. Write a short essay on " Fidelity of Animals."

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## FONTENOY (1745 A.D.)

Following the signing of the Treaty of Limerick the greater portion of the Irish army sailed from Ireland to take service with France, where, under a new flag,

these exiles gained renown and glory. For many years the fortunes of this Irish Brigade were watched with keen interest and renewed hope at home in Ireland, and with genuine astonishment and admiration all over Europe. The battle of Fontenoy is one of those engagements which will forever be associated with Irish prowess and daring.

This ballad by Thomas Davis (1815-1845) is the most martial poem of the collection; it is a song of victory, a triumphal cry to the motherland. The first three stanzas are descriptive of the battle—but towards the close of the third stanza, when retreat seems inevitable, we hear: “The Irish still remain”; from this point the poem carries one away; it is breathlessly exciting, enthusiastically real. Defeat is turned into victory, and but for these Irish exiles the struggle would inevitably have resulted in disaster for France.

*Tirailleurs*.—French military term: skirmisher, sharpshooter.

*Voltigeur*.—Light infantry.

*Fantassin*.—Footsoldier.

### EXERCISES

1. Trace the development of the action in the poem.
2. Scan the line:

Steady they load—steady they fire, moving right onward still.

3. Which of the three descriptions of a battle do you consider the most realistic: Limerick (The Blacksmith of Limerick), Aughrim (The Dog of Aughrim), or Fontenoy? Select lines from each of the poems descriptive of the attack.

THE MEMORY OF THE DEAD—THE CROPPY  
BOY

(1798 A.D.)

These two ballad poems deal with the Insurrection of '98. Ingram's song is bold in design and is very gracefully executed; Carroll Malone's ballad is direct, unadorned, and has all the characteristics of the perfect ballad.

## EXERCISES

1. Trace the development of the theme in "The Memory of the Dead." Note the link between the second, third and fourth stanzas: the lines:

Some lie far off beyond the wave,  
Some sleep in Ireland, too . . . .

are expanded in stanzas three and four.

2. Point out the characteristics that make "The Croppy Boy" a perfect specimen of the ballad.

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MICHAEL DWYER

(1803 A.D.)

The capture of Michael Dwyer was the last event in the Insurrection of 1798; with wonderful tenacity this gallant soldier succeeded in keeping his pursuers at bay, and his adventures and marvellous escapes are still the subject of the fireside tales in his native Wicklow. The unselfish act of the hero-martyr MacAlister to save his chief is treated with great effectiveness in this ballad.

## EXERCISES

1. What answer did Dwyer make to the soldiers when called upon to surrender?

2. What was MacAlister's plan for escape? Was his suggestion an unselfish one?

3. Of the heroic deeds you have read about in these poems, which do you consider the most worthy of admiration?

## THE WINDING BANKS OF ERNE

Here we read a farewell message by a poet to his native town, its pleasant pastimes and genial people. It is a charming ballad, simple in thought and language, and genuinely sincere. Allingham was a native of Ballyshannon, and though he spent a great deal of his time in London he has left us some very successful work dealing with this country. Note the excellently drawn word-pictures of familiar scenes and events of country life; the fishing expeditions, the evening pipe, "the sloping fields, the lofty rocks:" in which the poet exhibits such a command of apt descriptive terms.

### EXERCISES

1. What are the pleasures that the exile will miss when he leaves Ballyshannon?

2. Try to imagine the exile's return to Ballyshannon. Write a short account of his home-coming.

3. (a) Suggest a title for this stanza:

(b) Select a verse in Allingham's poem which expresses a somewhat similar thought:

O, kindly, generous, Irish land,  
 So leal and fair and loving!  
 No wonder the wandering Celt should think  
 And dream of you in his roving.  
 The alien home may have gems and gold,  
 Shadows may never have gloomed it;  
 But the heart will sigh for the absent land  
 Where the love-light first illumed it.





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